



Health & Aging: Holding Our Elders Up

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Chief Health Administrator
Tulalip Health System

I.H.S. Clinical & Community Workforce Summit

March 11, 2026



Chief Seattle's Wisdom

**“Even the rocks thrill with memories of past events,
The very dust beneath your feet respond more lovingly to
our footsteps, because it is the ashes of our Ancestors.
The soil is rich with the life of our Kindred.”**

~engraved on Chief Seattle's grave at The Suquamish Tribe











Timeline for Understanding

Pre-1492: Native American tribes inhabit what is now North and South America, living in diverse cultures with complex social, educational, spiritual and political structures.

1492-1800s: European colonization begins, leading to conflicts, displacement, and loss of land for Native American tribes. Treaties are negotiated, often broken by colonizers.

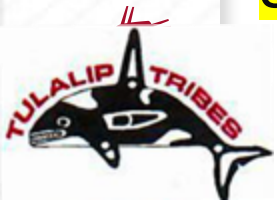
1741 Russia begins to colonize Alaska - starting in the Aleutian Region

1792 Captain Vancouver enters the Salish Sea

1830: Indian Removal Act leads to the forced relocation of many Native American tribes, notably the Cherokee along the Trail of Tears.

1868: The Treaty of Fort Laramie is signed, guaranteeing the Lakota Sioux ownership of the Black Hills.

Late 19th to early 20th century: Assimilation policies, including boarding schools, aimed at erasing Native American cultures and languages.



Timeline for Understanding

- The Department of Interior's 1883 **Code of Indian Offenses**—de facto laws that applied only to American Indians—punished Indian dances and feasts by imprisonment or withholding food (treaty rations) for up to 30 days. **Any medicine man convicted of encouraging others to follow traditional practices was to be confined in the agency prison for not less than 10 days or until he could provide evidence that he had abandoned his beliefs.**

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/blogs/national-museum-american-indian/2018/11/30/native-perspectives-american-indian-religious-freedom-act/>





22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32

11 South Main Street, St. Helena,

The Goal of Residential School

"We instil in them a pronounced distaste for the native life so that they will be humiliated when reminded of their origin. When they graduate from our institutions, the children have lost everything Native except their blood."

- Bishop ^(St.)Vital Grandin, 1875



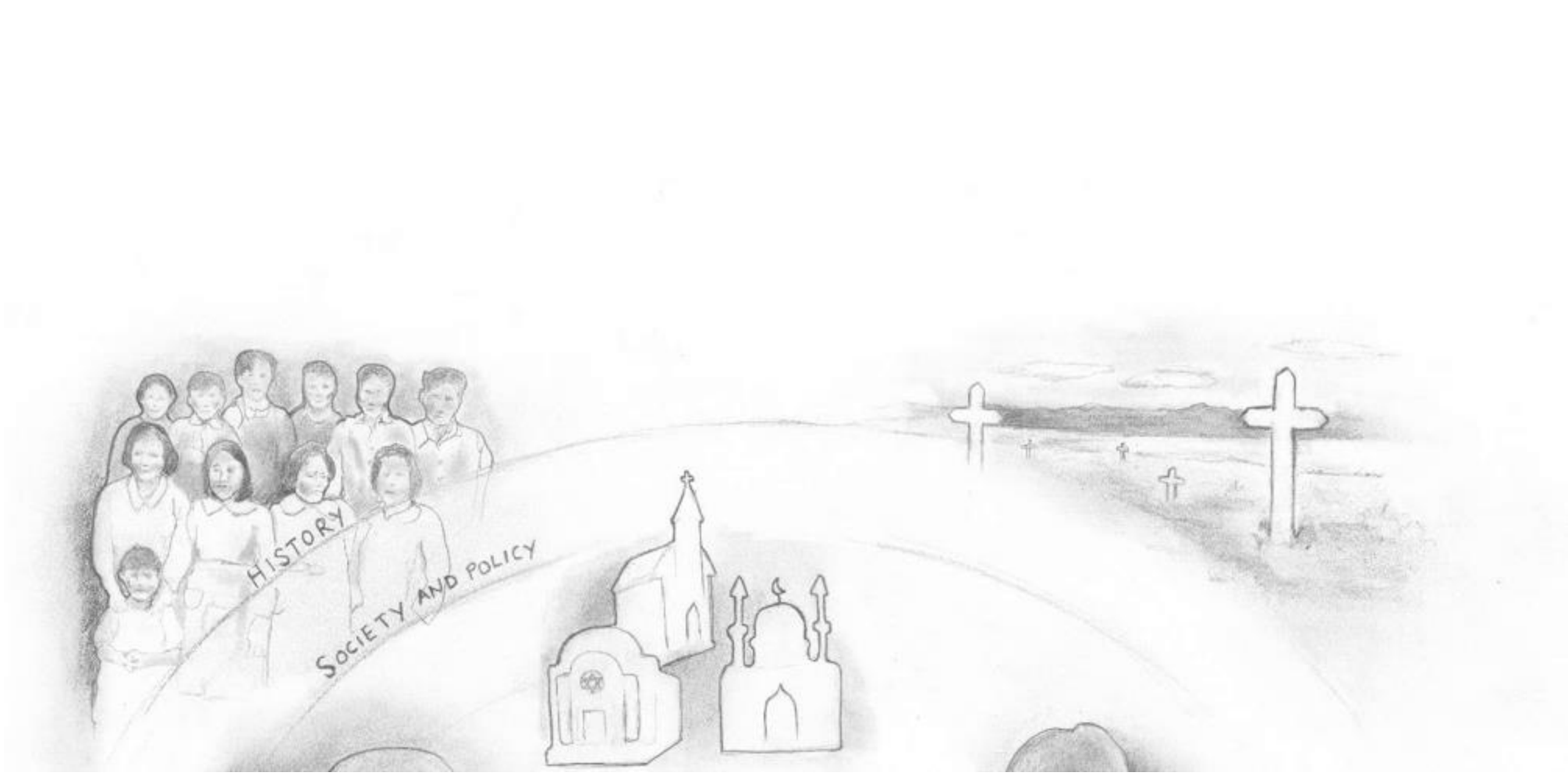
Timeline for Understanding

- **1924: The Indian Citizenship Act** grants citizenship to all Native Americans born in the United States.
- **1930** U.S. Commodity Foods Program
- **1950's** First Cases of Diabetes in Native American Communities
- **1953: Termination policy** initiated by the federal government, aiming to end the recognition of Native American tribes and assimilate individuals into mainstream society.
- **1960s-1970s:** Native American activism gains momentum, with events like the occupation of Alcatraz Island and the Trail of Broken Treaties.
- **1978: The American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA)** is passed, protecting and preserving Native American religious practices and sacred sites.



Historical Trauma





INFLAMED

DEEP MEDICINE AND THE
ANATOMY OF INJUSTICE



RUPA MARYA & RAJ PATEL

“The built environment is designed, intentionally or not, to cause depression, cognitive decline, dementia, and other illnesses – all mediated by inflammatory cytokines.”
— Raj Patel



Maladaptive Responses to Historical Trauma

➤ **Stockholm Syndrome**

Used to describe positive emotional attachments that some victims develop towards people who have abused, tortured, or taken them captive.

➤ **Cultural (Dissociative) Amnesia**

We 'forget' who we are, our Ways, Traditions and connection to the land, Creator

➤ Fight, Flight, Freeze, **FAWN**

We become enamored with the Captor/Colonizer's ways





Generational Strength

Dr. Angela
Michaud, DC
Photo used with
permission



**“WE OFTEN HEAR THAT
TRAUMA IS WOVEN
INTO OUR DNA... BUT
LET'S NEVER FORGET
THAT STRENGTH AND
RESILIENCY ARE TOO.”**

#TLSNunavik

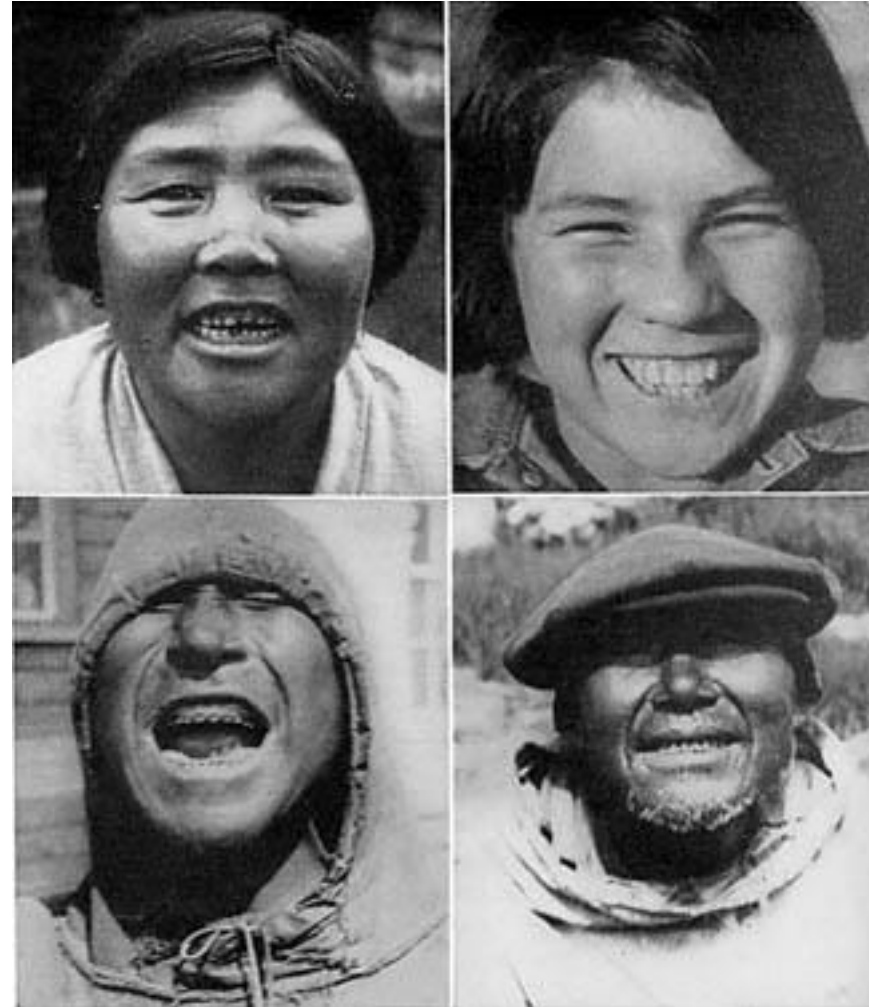


**Dr.
Weston
Price**



**1930's...travelled to
remote Alaskan villages**

**...examples of
physical excellence
and dental
perfection such as
has seldom been
excelled by any race
in the past or
present.**



“...strong rugged babies”



Virtually NO dental decay, until...



... villages with trading posts... "store grub" ...

"A typical effect of modernization on a growing girl was shown in a case in which the central incisors and 16 other teeth were attacked by dental caries. Sixty-four per cent of her teeth had tooth decay."



1st generation of children born after adoption of 'store grub'

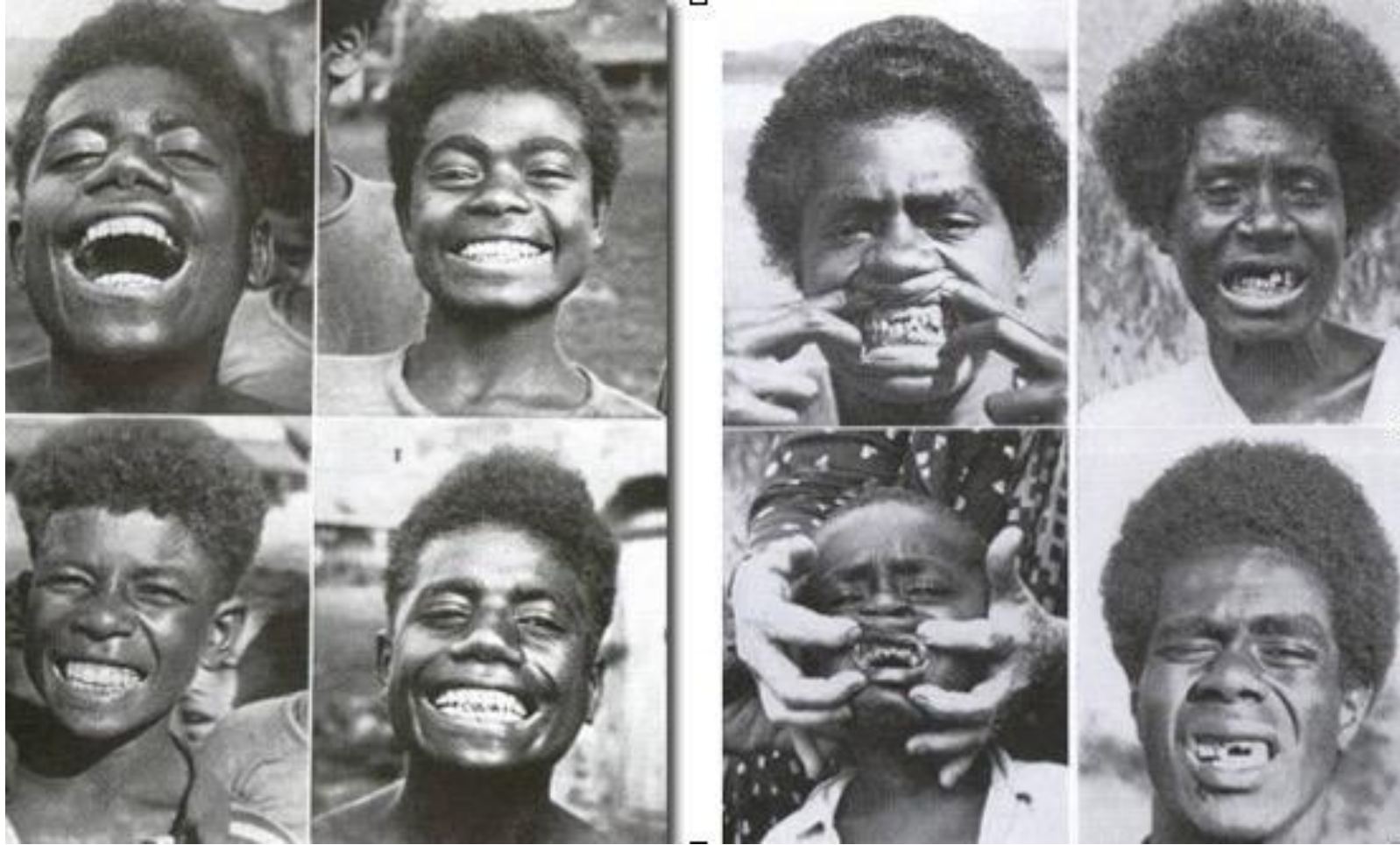
- Dental arch deformities
- Crooked Teeth
- Changed facial form

“We have few problems more urgent or more challenging than reversing these trends.”

Weston A. Price, 1933

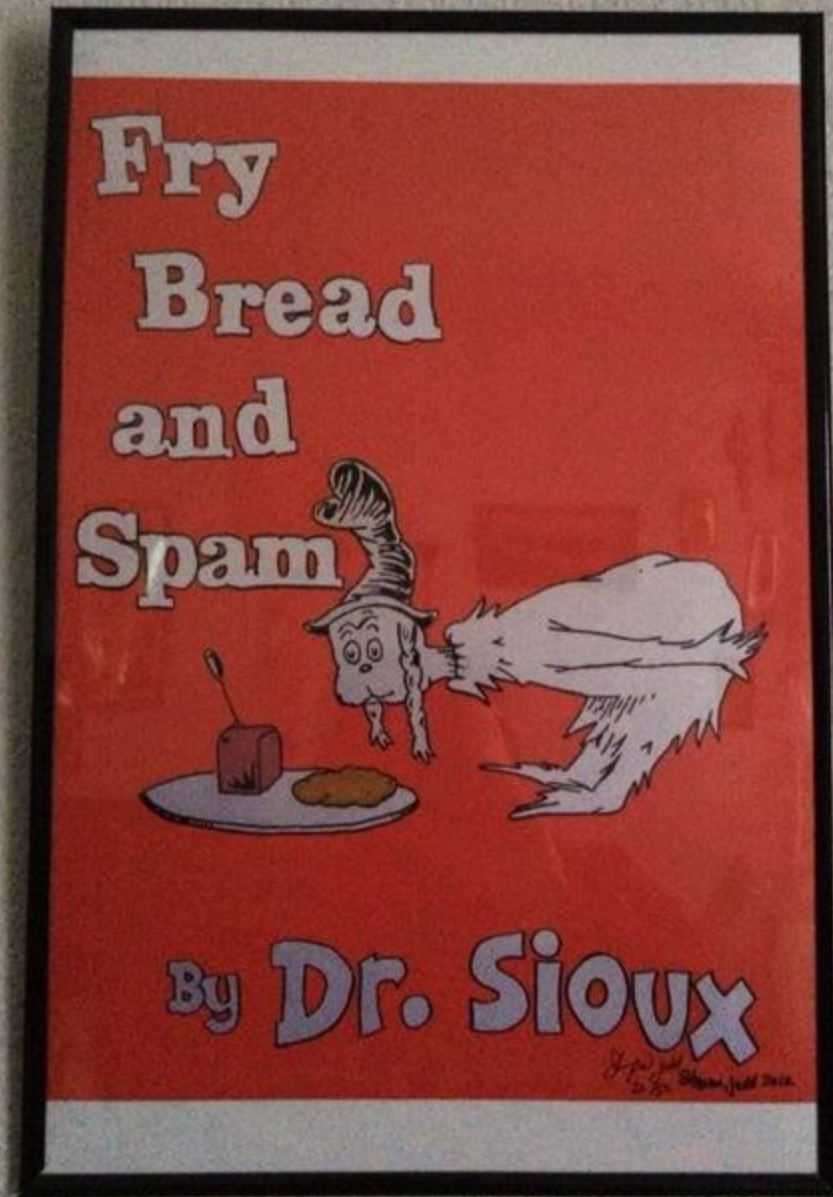






- Loss of ancestral diet: dental health plummeted, with defects in next generation with switch to processed foods

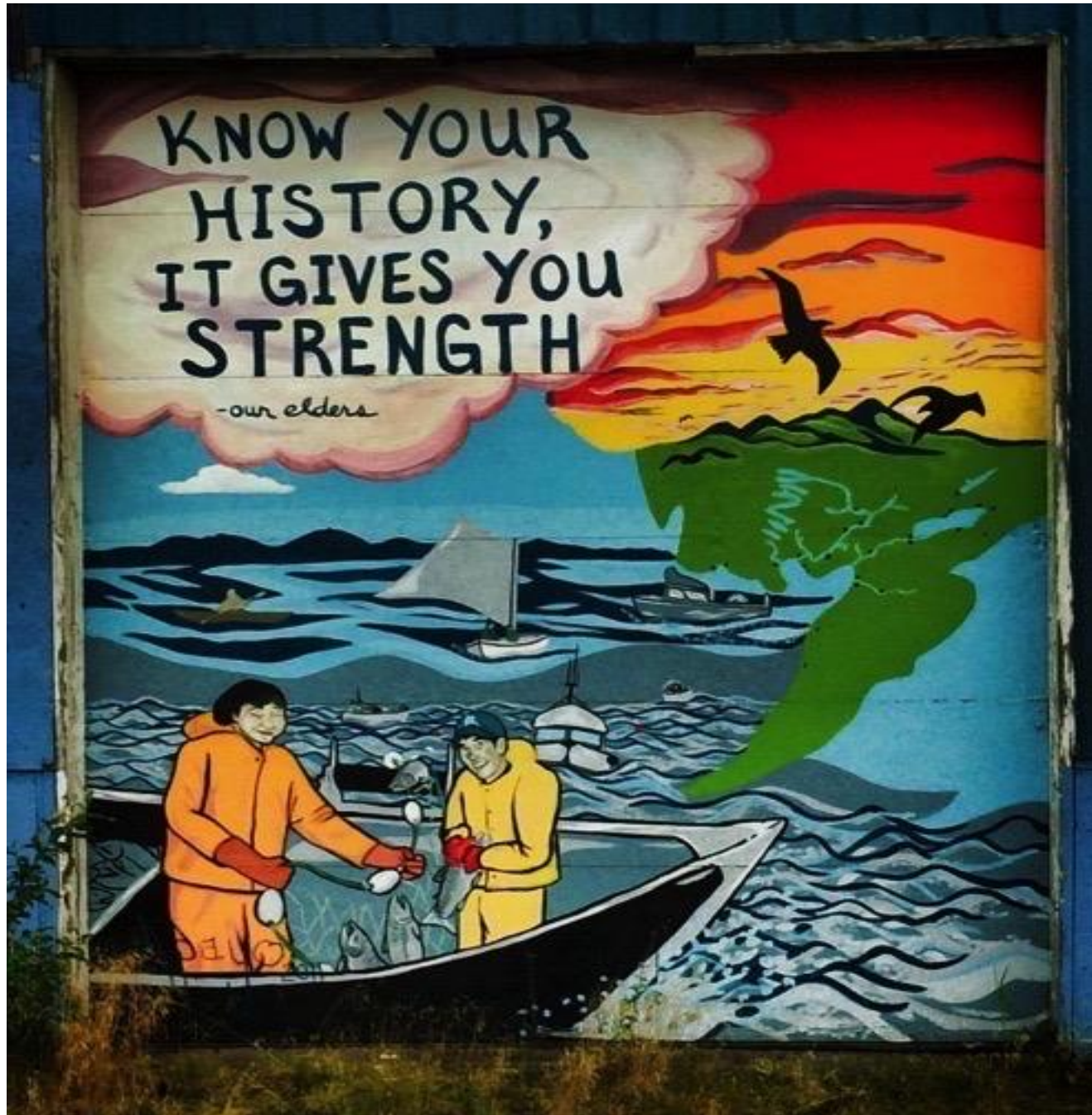




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Kiowa+Choctaw

KNOW YOUR
HISTORY,
IT GIVES YOU
STRENGTH

-our elders





Article



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Aa Aa



Declines in traditional marine food intake and vitamin D levels from the 1960s to present in young Alaska Native women

Diane M O'Brien ^(a1) ^(a2), Kenneth E Thummel ^(a3), Lisa R Bulkow ^(a4), Zhican Wang ^(a3) ... DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980016001853> Published online: 28 July 2016

Abstract

To measure the trends in traditional marine food intake and serum vitamin D levels in Alaska Native women of childbearing age (20–29 years old) from the 1960s to the present.

We measured a biomarker of traditional food intake, the $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ value, and vitamin D level, as 25-hydroxycholecalciferol (25(OH)D₃) concentration, in 100 serum samples from 20–29-year-old women archived in the Alaska Area Specimen Bank, selecting twenty-five per decade from the 1960s to the 1990s. We compared these with measurements of red-blood-cell $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values and serum 25(OH)D₃ concentrations from 20–29-year-old women from the same region collected during the 2000s and 2010s in a Center for Alaska Native Health Research study.

The Yukon Kuskokwim Delta region of south-west Alaska.

Alaska Native women (n 319) aged 20–29 years at the time of specimen collection.

Intake of traditional marine foods, as measured by serum $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values, decreased significantly each decade from the 1960s through the 1990s, then remained constant from the 1990s through the present ($F_{5,306}=77.4$, $P<0.0001$). Serum vitamin D concentrations also decreased from the 1960s to the present ($F_{4,162}=26.1$, $P<0.0001$).

Consumption of traditional marine foods by young Alaska Native women dropped significantly between the 1960s and the 1990s and was associated with a significant decline in serum vitamin D concentrations. Studies are needed to evaluate the promotion of traditional marine foods and routine vitamin D supplementation during pregnancy for this population.

Export citation

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Keywords:

Nutrition transition

Rickets

25-Hydroxycholecalciferol concentration

 $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ value

Stable isotope ratios

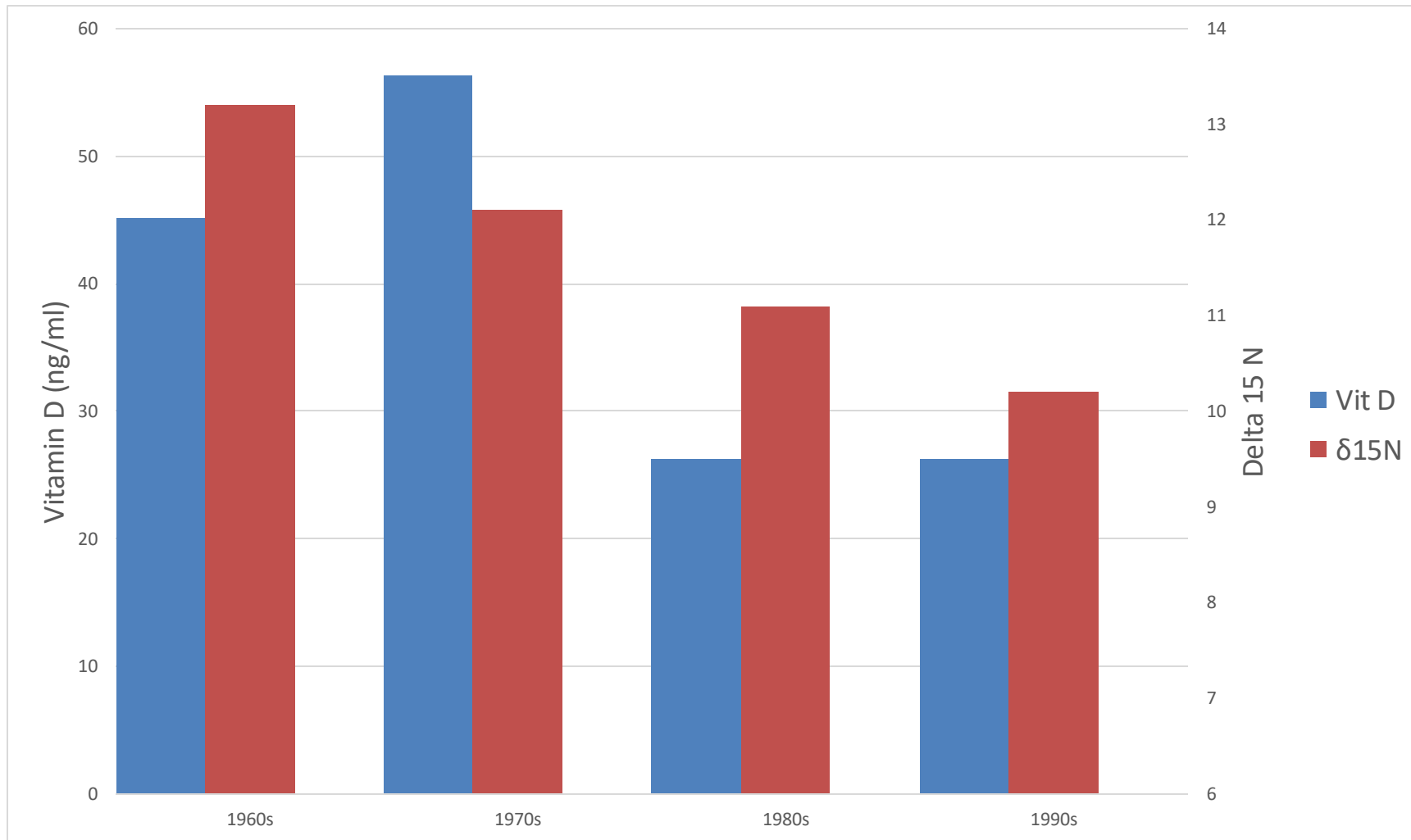
Arctic health

Circumpolar health

O'Brien, D.M., Thummel, K.E., Bulkow, L.R., Wang, Z., Corbin, B., Klejka, J., Hopkins, S.E., Boyer, B.B., Hennessy, T.W. and Singleton, R. (2016) 'Declines in traditional marine food intake and vitamin D levels from the 1960s to present in young Alaska Native women', *Public Health Nutrition*, , pp. 1–8. doi: 10.1017/S1368980016001853.



Serum Vitamin D and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values, YK Women, 1960s to 1990s





“

Now it appears that our diets and lifestyles can change the expression of our genes. How? By influencing a network of chemical switches within our cells collectively known as the epigenome.

- *NOVA's Ghost in Your Genes, PBS*

”

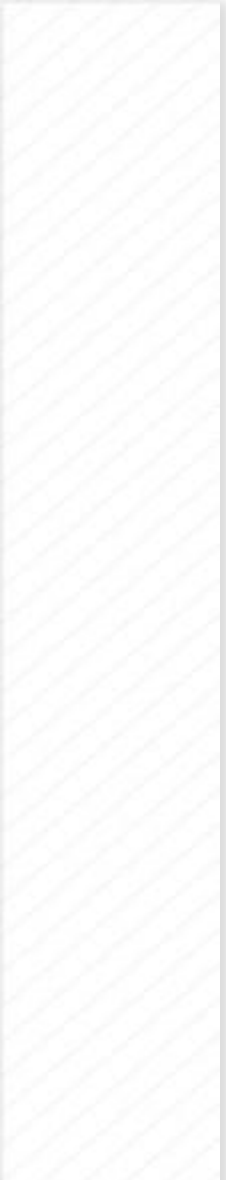


Lower Prevalence of Impaired Glucose Tolerance and Diabetes Associated With Daily Seal Oil or Salmon Consumption among Alaska Natives

1. [Amanda I Adler, MD, PHD,](#)
2. [Edward J Boyko, MD, MPH,](#)
3. [Cynthia D Schraer, MD and](#)
4. [Neil J Murphy, MD](#)







“Let foods be your medicine”

-Hippocrates



“

"According to the First Nations Development Institute, food sovereignty is defined as 'the inherent right of a community to identify their own food system.' This means that as a community we have the power to choose the food on our table."

Valerie Segrest (Muckleshoot), NMAI Interview, August 2016

”

Valerie Segrest is the director of the Muckleshoot Food Sovereignty Project.



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HUNT

FISH

GATHER

GROW



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Traditional First Foods





ELECTRONIC ARTICLE ➔

Prenatal and Postnatal Flavor Learning by Human Infants

Julie A. Mennella, PhD, Coren P. Jagnow, MS, Gary K. Beauchamp,
PhD

[+ Author Affiliations](#)

ABSTRACT

Background. Flavors from the mother's diet during pregnancy are transmitted to amniotic fluid and swallowed by the fetus. Consequently, the types of food eaten by women during pregnancy and, hence, the flavor principles of their culture may be experienced by the infants before their first exposure to solid foods. Some of these same flavors will later be experienced by infants in breast milk, a liquid that, like amniotic fluid, comprises flavors that directly reflect the foods, spices, and beverages eaten by the mother. The present study tested the hypothesis that experience with a flavor in amniotic fluid or breast milk modifies the infants' acceptance and enjoyment of similarly flavored foods at weaning.

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This Article

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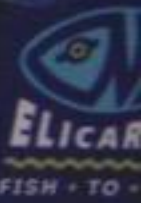
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GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

I  **PIK**
(REAL) **SALMON** **HARD WORK** **EAT**

EAT NEQ'PIK!



EAT **IN** **LOCAL ECONOMY** **HEALTHY**
THANKFUL







Traditional Food Guide

FOR ALASKA NATIVE
CANCER SURVIVORS

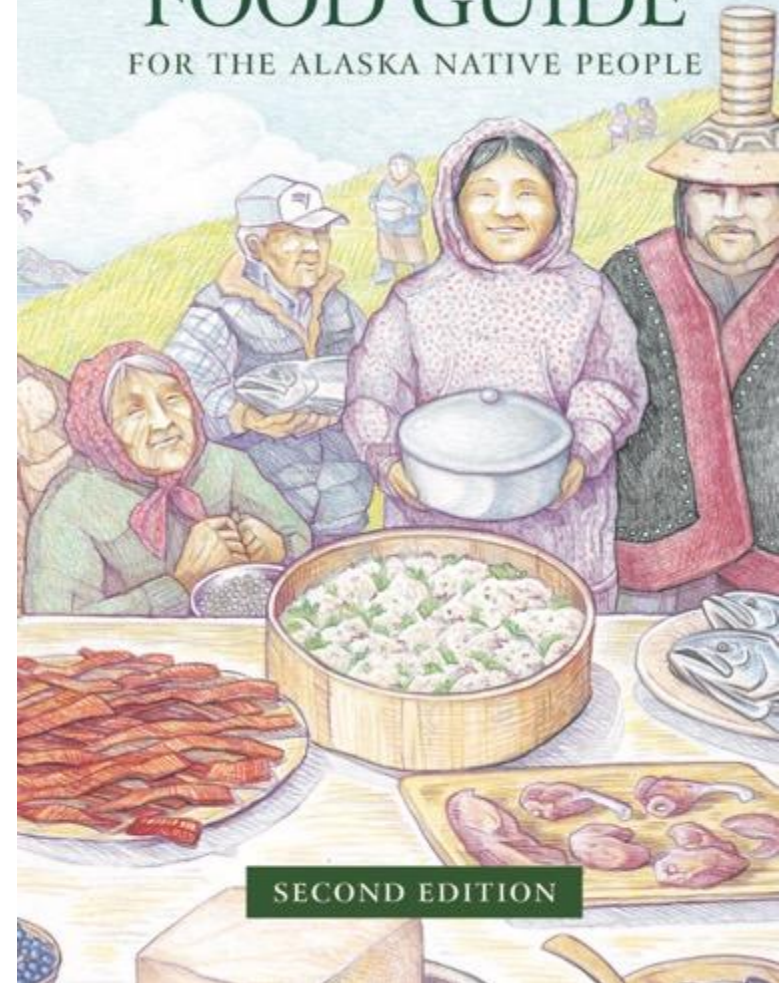


Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium
Cancer Program



TRADITIONAL FOOD GUIDE

FOR THE ALASKA NATIVE PEOPLE



SECOND EDITION

SAVE-the-DATE June 21-24, 2015
Alaska Pacific University, Anchorage, AK



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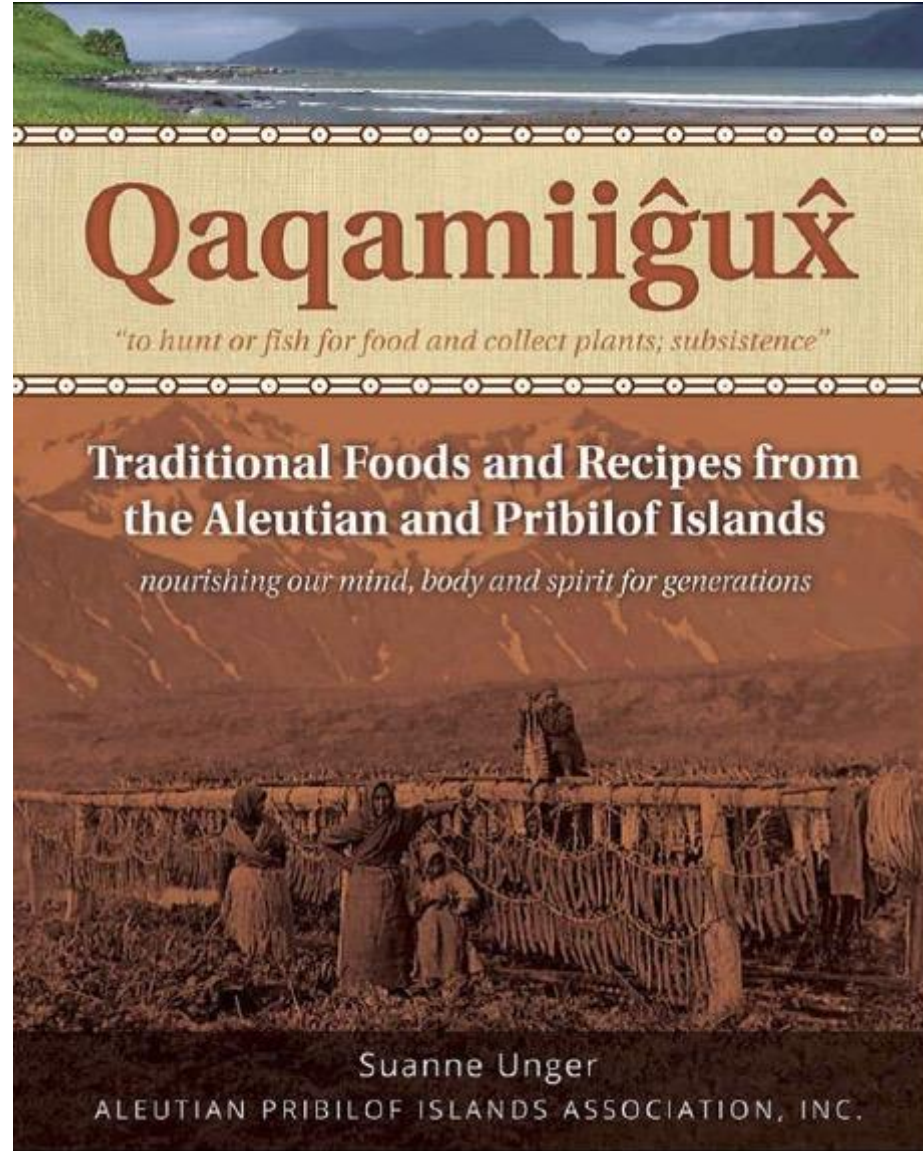


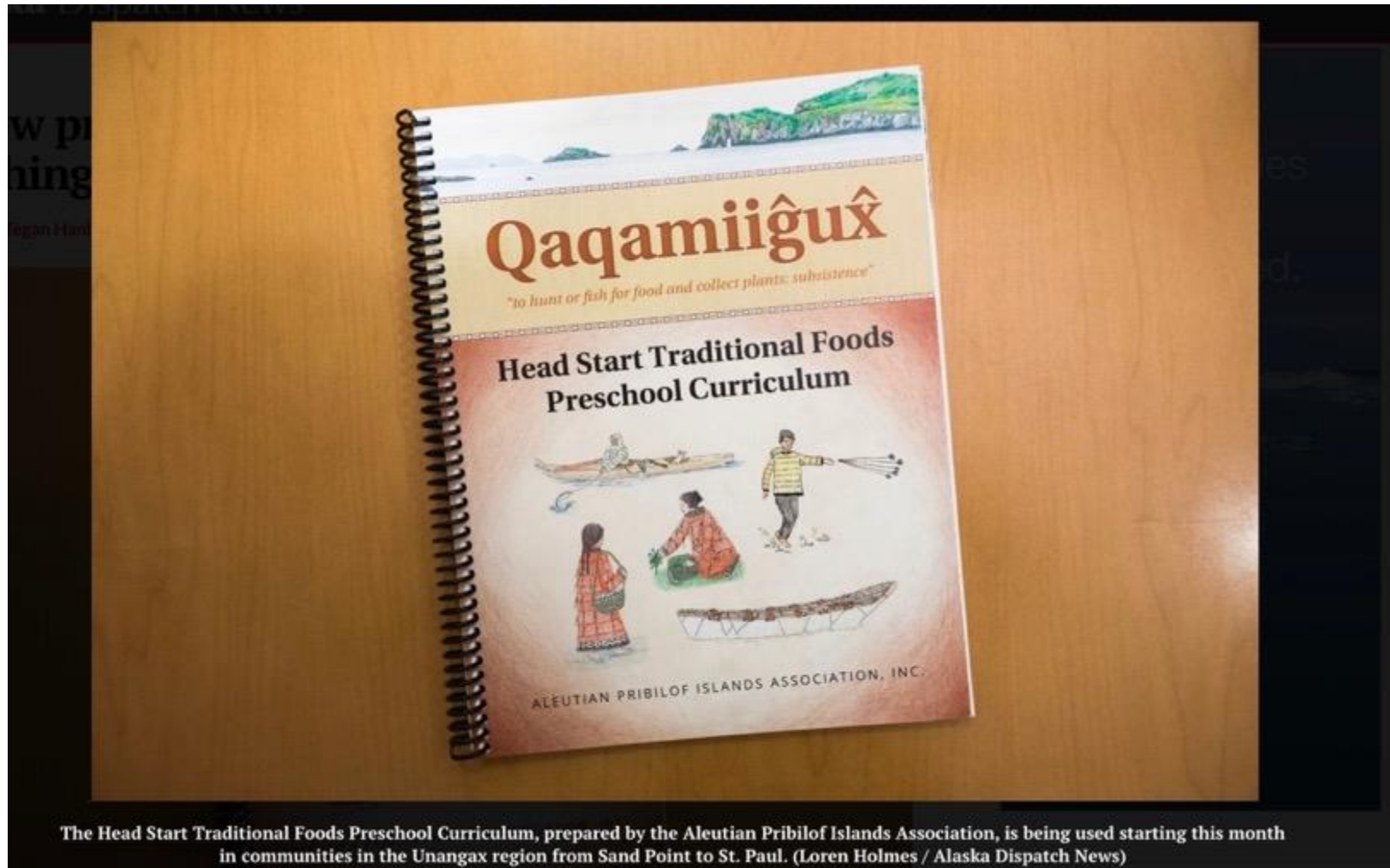
Inuvialuit elders with Robert W. Bandringa

Inuvialuit *Nautchiangit*

relationships between people and plants







The Head Start Traditional Foods Preschool Curriculum, prepared by the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, is being used starting this month in communities in the Unangax region from Sand Point to St. Paul. (Loren Holmes / Alaska Dispatch News)



PART IV
**TRADITIONAL FOODS IN
NATIVE AMERICA**
A compendium of traditional foods stories
from American Indian and Alaska Native communities



<https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/ndwp/pdf/part-iv---traditional-foods-in-native-america.pdf>



THE PEOPLE AWAKENING PROJECT

DISCOVERING
ALASKA NATIVE
PATHWAYS TO
SOBRIETY



Culture is Medicine





Unangaʔ Elder
Agnes Thompson
Niigugim Tanasxaa Culture
Camp (Atka, Alaska)



Intergenerational Connectedness



Connectedness In Action

Connectedness Mechanisms

<u>Family</u>	<u>Community</u>	<u>Land/Place</u>	<u>Intergenerational</u>	<u>Spirit</u>
Language	Language	Language	Language	Language
Spending time together	Celebrations	Hunting	Part of a continuous history	Ceremonies
Relational Roles	Dancing/Singing	Gathering	Awareness of historical trauma	Cultural values
Responsibility	Ceremonies	Teaching children	Responsibility to future generations	Art
Namesakes & Nicknames	Service to others	Learning from Elders	Learning ancestral teachings to pass on to younger generations	Stories
Adoption	Mentoring	Exploration	Participation in cultural and community activities	Love, Humor, Truth
Togetherness	Rules, values, norms	Observation	Knowledge of family lineage	Beauty
Trust and safety	Safety nets	Travel		Dance
Sharing and support	Family relationships	Care for animals		Subsistence foods
Helping Elders	Social groups	Stories		Songs/Dance/Drum
Stories, family history	Collective belonging	Playing outside		Connection to ancestors and future generations
Recognition of personal talents	Cooperative Teams	Access to clean water		Collective mentality
	Subsistence sharing	Fish camp		Spiritual teachings
	Strong leadership	Survival skills		



Ullrich, J. S. (2019). For the love of our children: an Indigenous connectedness framework. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 15(2), 121-130.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180119828114>

Our Iñupiat Values

Our values guide our daily lives:

Love and Respect for Our Elders and for One Another:
Piqpakkutiqaḡniq suli Qiksiksrautiqaḡniq Utuqqanaanun Allanullu

Respect for Nature: *Qiksiksrautiqaḡniq Iñuuniaḡvigmun*

Knowledge of Family Kinship and Roles: *Iḡagiḡñiq*

Sharing: *Aviktuaqatigiḡñiq*

Knowledge of Language: *Iñupiuraallaniq*

Cooperation: *Paammaaḡigiḡñiq*

Having a Sense of Humor: *Quvianguniq*

Knowledge of Hunting Traditions: *Aḡuniallaniq*

Compassion: *Nagliktuutiqaḡniq*

Humility: *Qiñuiññiq*

Avoidance of Conflict: *Paaḡfaktautaiññiq*

Spirituality: *Ukpiqqutiqaḡniq*





SOUTHEAST TRADITIONAL TRIBAL VALUES

“OUR WAY OF LIFE”

- Discipline and Obedience to the Traditions of our Ancestors
- Respect for Self, Elders and Others
- Respect for Nature and Property
- Patience
- Pride in Family, Clan and Traditions is found in Love, Loyalty and Generosity
- Be Strong in Mind, Body and Spirit
- Humor
- Hold Each Other Up
- Listen Well and with Respect
- Speak with Care
- We are Stewards of the Air, Land and Sea
- Reverence for Our Creator
- Live in Peace and Harmony
- Be Strong and Have Courage

Developed, Adapted, and Approved at the 2004 Elders Forum on Traditional Values

Sponsored by Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, Circles of Care, SAMHSA Substance Abuse Planning Project, Elderly Nutrition Program, Johnson O'Malley Program and Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative, Alaska Association of School Boards



- Kadaan axtaaganaaxtin, E / Kadamis agalagada, W / **Don't get ahead of yourself.**
- Aduxtanaan akidada, E / Adut akida, W / **Pay your debts.**
- Qaqamiiguu, E / Qaqamiiguu, W / **Subsistence.**
- Tunuun ugunuhtalakan angaagixtin, E / Unangam Tunuu ugunuhtalagada, W / **Don't forget your Unangan Language.**

VALUES OF THE UNANGAN/UNANGAS

- Anagaagisi matanaan imin ixamnaku. Anaagix ukunachin imchin ugutaasaamchim agnahtxichin. / Anagaagisiin siga imis aku mal siga inixsilsada. **Life is gifted to you. What you make of it is your gift in return.**
- Tuman ilaanugitxin, Unangan maqaxtadqangin mataagin matakun. / Anagaagisiin, ilaazat ama Ulamis anagaaginangis maqaxsingis idaxtalagada. **Know your family tree, relations and people's history.**
- Tanaangin Igayusalix anagaaimchin agnahtxichin. / Tana, Alaagu ama slum imuunuu huzuu anaagin sahnagaxtada. **Live with and respect the land, sea, and all nature.**
- Wan ala gum ilan anaagin anagaingin usuu Aguuagu agach ngiin agiqaa. / Algas ama anaagin anagaingin huzungis Aguu gum agacha ngiin agiqaa haqataasada. **Respect and be aware of the creator in all living things.**
- Txin achigalix anagaigumin anuxtanatxin axsaasaduukuhtxin. / Huzugaan txin achiga agacha mada ama txin sakaagatada. **Always learn and maintain a balance.**
- Qaqamiigu qalgadam ukulganaa ngiin ugutaasakun. / Qaqamiigu qalgada Anagaagix ngiin axtanaku. **Subsistence is sustenance for the life.**
- Unangam tunuu unangqasining asix tunuhtalaaagnaqing. Unangan anaan Ukuhtaxiku. / Unangam tunuu Unangas alganaa ukuchiza ama huzu ngiin tunuhtaxiza. **Our language defines who we are and lets us communicate with one another.**

Authorized by Moses Dirks, President, Association of Unangan Educators and the Elders Academy



**“Xechit-en schaleche l’ en-tengexw.
Know your relatives and where you
are from.” TSI’LI’XW (BILL) JAMES, LUMMI**

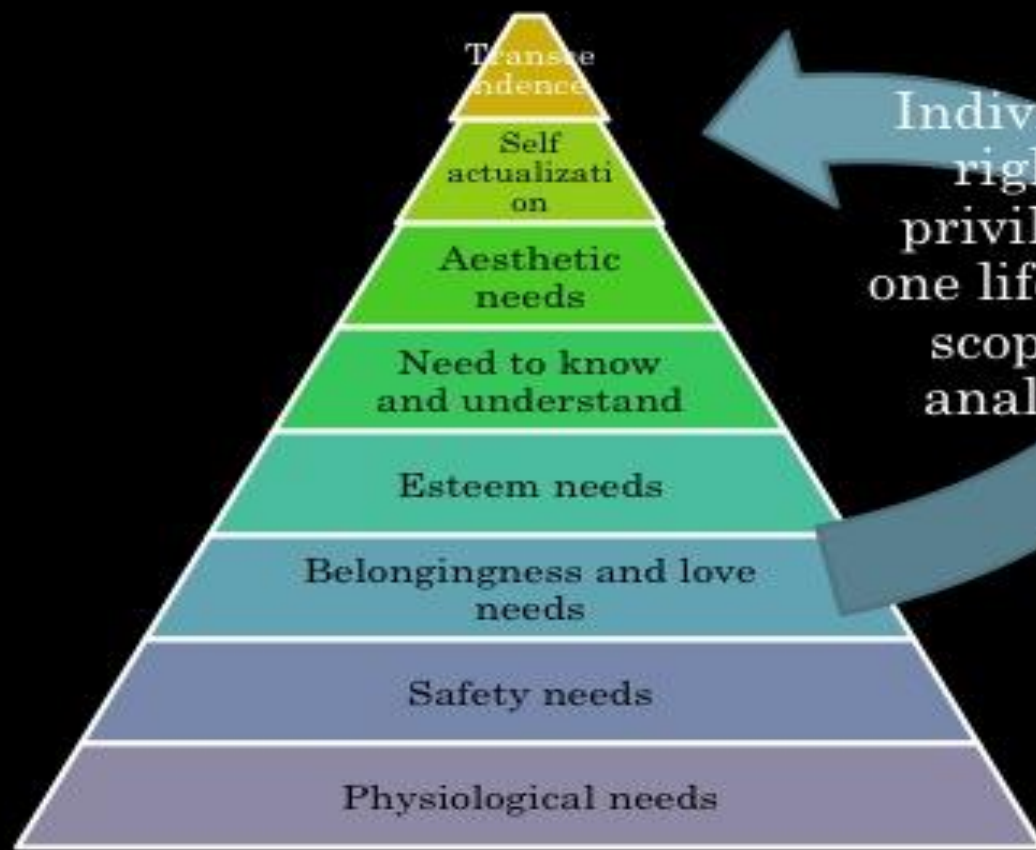




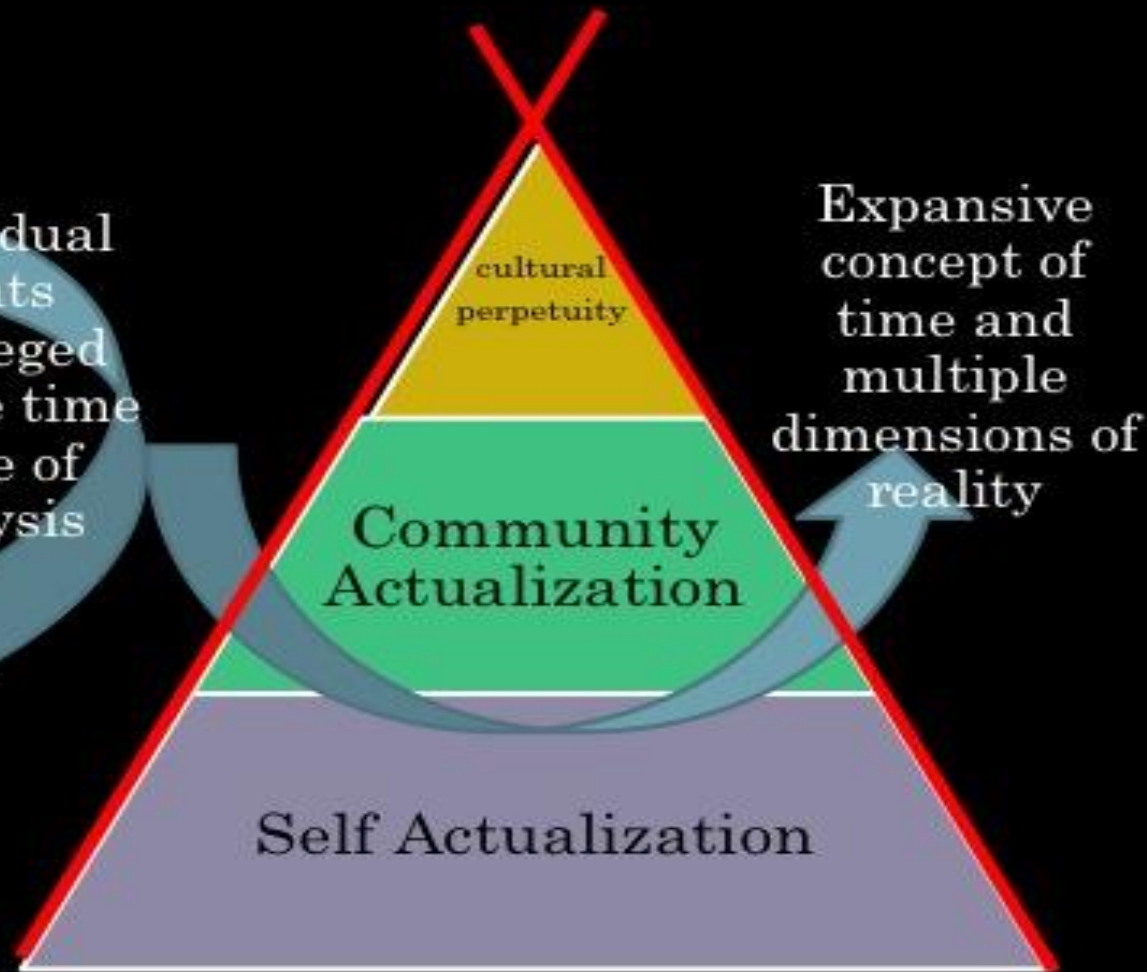


MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS (INFORMED BY BLACKFOOT NATION (ALTA))

Western Perspective



First Nations Perspective



Individual rights privileged one life time scope of analysis

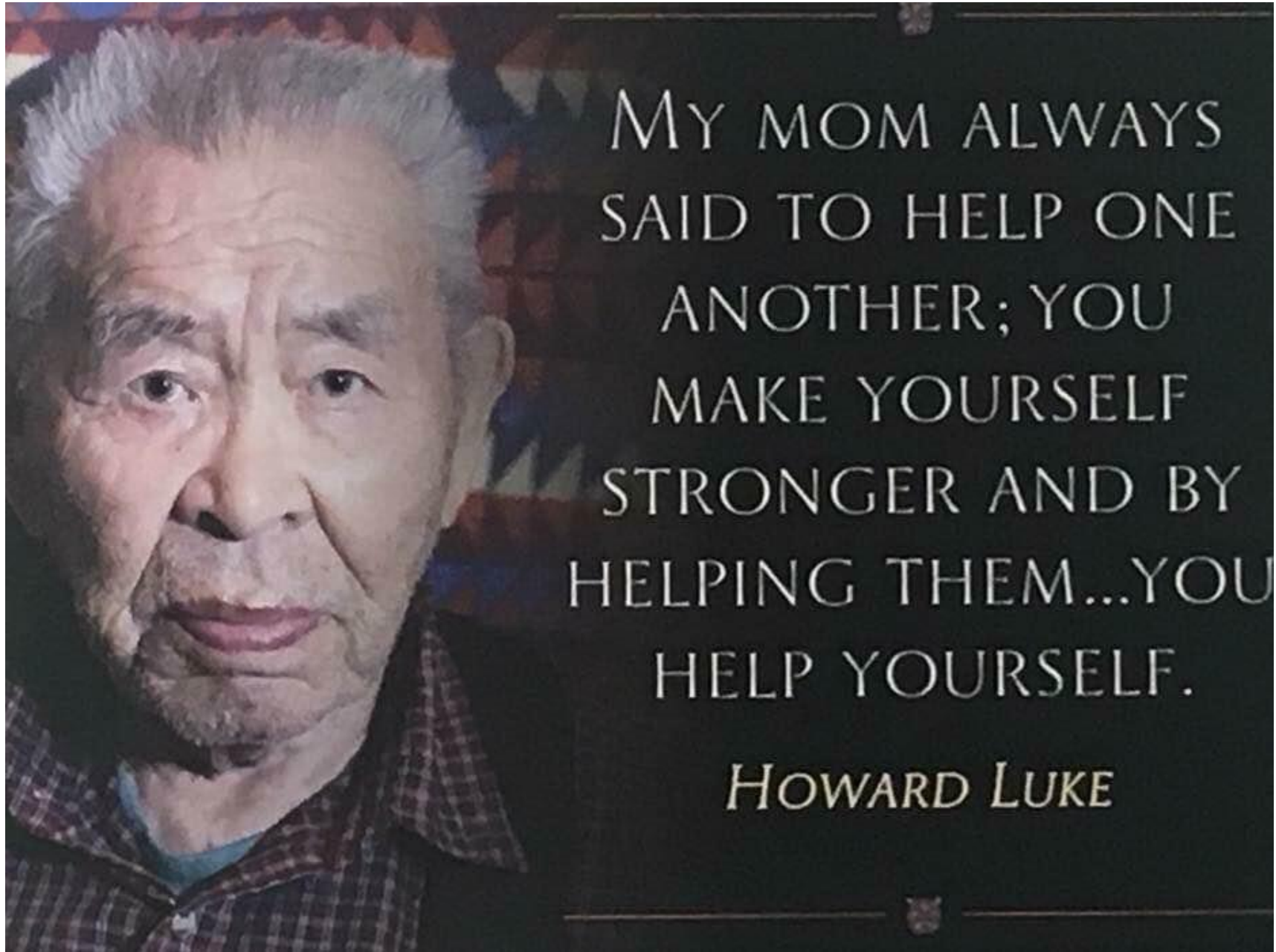


Successful Aging Through the Eyes of Alaska Native People

- Taking responsibility for one's own health and wellbeing
- Being active in the community
- Passing down knowledge and wisdom (rather than basing it solely on physical health).

Lewis, J. (2010). Successful aging through the eyes of Alaska Natives. Exploring generational differences among Alaska Natives. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology*, 25 (4), 385-396. doi:10.1007/s10823-010-9124-8.





MY MOM ALWAYS
SAID TO HELP ONE
ANOTHER; YOU
MAKE YOURSELF
STRONGER AND BY
HELPING THEM...YOU
HELP YOURSELF.

HOWARD LUKE



Cultural Considerations: Language and Legacy



- Approximately 150 American Indian and Alaska Native languages are still in use
- Assess literacy levels before providing written materials
- Use "probability statements" with caution as they may not translate accurately and be misinterpreted as fact
- Avoid direct sharing of negative information as some traditions view words and thoughts as influencing outcomes
- Use indirect communication, for example, involve a third party or avoid direct "you" statements when discussing potential negative outcomes



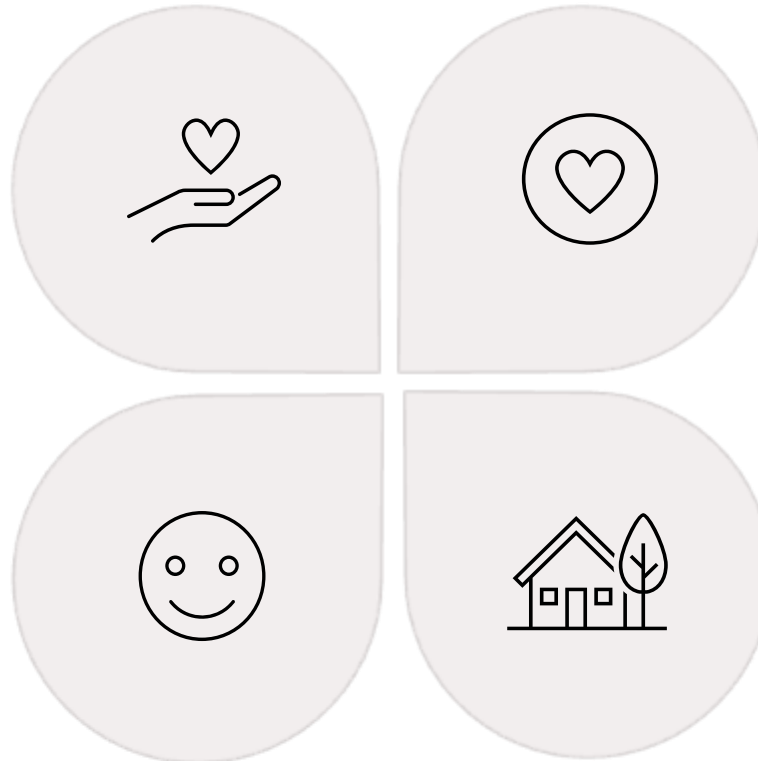


Cultural Considerations

Vary by tribal nation, family, and individual circumstances

Ask permission before discussing palliative care as it is a sensitive topic for American Indian and Alaska Native people

Document cultural activities people living with dementia enjoy to help them achieve wellbeing



Be aware that some dementia-related behaviors are viewed as a gift or blessing that do not need treatment

Be familiar with challenges faced by rural communities and resilient practices of American Indian and Alaska families and people living with dementia



“The past is not a burden. It is a scaffold which brought us to this day. We are free to be who we are, to create our own life out of our past and out of our present. We are our ancestors. When we can heal ourselves, we also heal our ancestors, our grandmothers, our grandfathers, and our children. **When we heal ourselves, we heal mother earth.”**

“To heal is to become ourselves, to become the light within. It is to accept ourselves and what we feel, and in doing so accept others. It is to be a real person”

~Dr. Rita Blumenstein, Yup'ik Tribal Doctor





“Now is the time to share Traditional Knowledge for our own well-being and for the sake of our future generations.”

**Dr. Rita Blumenstein,
Yup'ik Tribal Doctor**



Let us be the
ancestors our
descendants will
thank.

Winona Laduke

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